

SPEECH OF ACCEPTANCE

BY

HON. DUNBAR ROWLAND

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PRESENTED BY



PHOTOGRAPHIC FACSIMILE OF PORTRAIT OF JEFFERSON DAVIS,
REPRODUCED FROM ORIGINAL PAINTING BY CARL GUTHERZ, WHICH
HANGS IN THE MISSISSIPPI HALL OF FAME.

Speech of Acceptance

By

Hon. Dunbar Rowland



PRESS OF BRANDON PRINTING COMPANY
NASHVILLE, TENN.

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SPEECH OF ACCEPTANCE.

Governor Vardaman, Daughters of the Confederacy, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In appearing before this cultured audience, which so fully represents the patriotism of Mississippi, it is hardly necessary to assure you that I am deeply sensible of the true significance of the occasion.

The presentation by the Mississippi Division of the Daughters of the Confederacy to the State of this splendid portrait of Jefferson Davis reveals the fact that our people honor, revere and love his memory with a devotion which increases with the passage of time. His likeness comes to us, draped in the silken folds of the flags he endeavored so nobly to defend, which is proof of a people's reverence for that past in which he bore so heroic a part, and an evidence of the pride which we of this generation take in the history of our fathers.

So long as a people honor their past and revere the great characters who have enriched their history, so long will that people give noble deeds to the world.

This patriotic offering to the State, of the likeness of its most illustrious citizen, is proof of the noble character of its people and bears witness of their affection for his memory. No name upon the pages of American history commands from the Southern people more honor, reverence and love than that of Jefferson Davis. We honor him for his unwavering devotion to principle throughout a long and event-

ful life, we revere him for his loyalty to a cause for which our fathers bled and died, and we love him because he suffered for us.

Seneca was once asked by an ambitious Roman youth, "Who is the greatest man in history?" His answer was, "He who chooses the right with the most invincible resolution." We are willing to apply that standard to the life and character of Jefferson Davis.

This likeness of the President of the Confederacy represents him as he was in 1861, when he delivered his farewell address to the Senate of the United States. It recalls him at a time of life when he was at the full zenith of his magnificent powers, before the black havoc of civil war had swept across his pathway, saddening the light in his eye and furrowing his noble brow with heavy lines of care.

A description of that scene in the Senate may serve to give this noble portrait an historical setting in the minds of those who have gathered here to do honor to the man it represents.

Let us, then, picture the American Senate as it was on January 20, 1861. An eager throng packs the Senate chamber. Every seat is occupied and every foot of space holds a man. The galleries are filled to overflowing. The excited people have come to witness one of the most dramatic events which has ever occurred in the halls of the American Congress. John C. Breckenridge, the distinguished young Kentuckian, is presiding. The intelligence, genius, grace and culture of the nation compose this splendid audience. All is in waiting, when, during a moment of breathless anxiety, a tall, scholarly looking man with an ascetic,

slightly melancholy air, rises in his seat. There is a look of quiet determination on his face. There is also evidence of deep emotion. You see something in the poise of his head, the dignity of his bearing, and hear something in the deep earnestness of his tones which tell you of a spirit ready for the painful duty that lies before him. That man is Jefferson Davis, a Senator from Mississippi, a member of the foremost rank, a soldier whose superb courage was shown at Buena Vista, a statesman, orator and logician, who is about to deliver a speech which is a personal farewell to the Senate and the valedictory of the Southern States.

Mississippi had withdrawn from the Union and Jefferson Davis, her strongest stay, would not fail her in her hour of need, but chose to tread with her any path which she might walk in defense of her constitutional rights. She had exercised a right that the nation had taught its sons at its great military academy.

As the speaker, with majestic calmness and dignity, undaunted by the suppressed excitement and intense feeling around him, begins to plead the cause which he believes to be right, he is followed with fixed and eager attention. As he continues the pathos of the situation makes strong men weep, for they feel that this is the official announcement of the dissolution of the Union.

That farewell speech of Jefferson Davis is full of courage, dignity and moderation, and is famous in the annals of American oratory as one of the great epoch-making speeches of the century.

In Grattan's eulogy of Chatham he says that the great Englishman "was born to strike a blow in the world that

should resound through its history." How well does that phrase portray the career of Jefferson Davis.

There are certain attributes of character which rarely fail to make leaders of men who possess them. Mr. Davis had a rare combination of these great qualities. He was independent, self-reliant and resolute. He had earnest and intelligent convictions, combined with intense devotion to principle. He had a magnificent courage, which commanded the admiration of the people, and an integrity of character which won their confidence. He was not an ephemeral growth, springing into existence from abnormal social conditions, but the splendid product of a civilization which had given to the world the most superb characters known to history. Jefferson Davis was of patrician mould. He was endowed by nature with the rarest qualities of both mind and spirit, to which had been added the highest culture and training. The people of Mississippi delighted to honor him, and during the long period of his public service not a shadow of wrong ever marked his conduct. It was but an added proof of the high esteem in which the Southern people held him, that when the Confederacy was organized he was placed at its head. Mr. Davis had a wonderful comprehension of the terrible struggle which was before him, and with rare judgment he called to his side the men who became the heroes of history. Together they led the great struggle for an independent nationality. They felt that the constitution of their fathers had been violated, and with a spirit which animated the makers of that palladium of liberty, they rallied to its defense. The cause for which they fought failed, but greatness does not always consist in

gaining something, but in being true. Not for one moment during that long and bitter struggle did these princely spirits waver in their devotion to duty. They emerged from that bloody conflict with unstained honor, and no memory of their recreancy remains to-day to torture the sons of the South.

Great as the leader of the Southern Confederacy appears at every period of his life, at no time does his adamant strength of character display itself as in the hour of defeat. With a courage that could not be broken, and a fortitude which was strengthened by affliction, he bore himself in that dark hour as only a hero could, and gave to the world no outward sign of what his great soul suffered. Though not a ray of that splendid hope, which had arched its beautiful bow above his country, remained to cheer him, he refused to regard life as a burden and a failure. He believed that life was the supremest gift of God, and continued to pursue its aims and ends with a noble interest that is unprecedented in history and beautiful to contemplate.

He toiled, even to extreme old age, to give as his parting blessing to the children of the South a true history of their fathers' deeds.

To us he represents all that is best in Southern character, and we shall continue to honor him as long as one fair green stretch of this beautiful land, for whose honor he gave himself a willing sacrifice, remains in our keeping.

Daughters of the Confederacy, you have wrought well. You have given to Mississippi many noble proofs of your affection. To-day you bring a gift which touches her great heart, for it represents the purest and most unselfish love,

and is proof of that sublime devotion to country which so truly characterized your mothers.

It has been my pleasant privilege to place in the State's Hall of Fame the portraits of many distinguished Mississippians, and I have cherished with pride the place which to me is a beautiful memorial to what is true, high and noble in our State life. It is with a heart touched with reverential awe that I shall place this noble likeness there, for in its majestic presence I feel as if I stood before some sacred shrine, upon whose holy altars burn a sacrifice to Truth and Justice.

In accepting from you this offering of love, this work of genius, for which I tender sincerest thanks, I assure you that it shall have the place of honor among that splendid galaxy of great spirits, and throughout the years it shall serve to remind future generations of the love of those who gave it.





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